IN THE CLAIMS

Kindly amend the claims as follows:

1-19.   (Cancelled)

20.   (Currently   Amended)   A   load-sharing   multi-homed   firewall   array comprising:

an array of firewall machines coupled in parallel with an IP-compliant network;

each of the firewall machines of the array further comprising:

a first edge connection corresponding to a first network connection and a second edge connection corresponding to a second network connection;

said first and second edge connections further comprising a first and second set of virtual hosts, said first set of virtual hosts configured to interface an associated firewall machine with said IP-compliant network and said second set of virtual hosts configured to interface an associated firewall machine with a private network;

each of said virtual hosts of said first and second sets corresponding to a distinct home through which a fully bi-directional connection may be made between said IP-compliant network and said private network;

DNS functionality associated with each of firewall machines of the array;

a master configuration file associated with each of the firewall machines; and

wherein an ensuing connection request is mapped to the first firewall machine of the array to respond to a DNS request associated with said ensuing connection request.

21.   (Previously Presented) The load-sharing multi-homed firewall array of claim 20, wherein a connection request received from the IP-compliant network is mapped to said first set of virtual hosts on the first firewall machine of the array to respond to a DNS request.

22.   (Previously Presented) The load-sharing multi-homed firewall array of claim 20, wherein a connection request received from the private network is mapped to said second set of virtual hosts on the first firewall machine of the array to respond to a DNS request.

23.   (Previously Presented) The load-sharing multi-homed firewall array of claim 20, wherein each of said firewall machines further comprises a special-purpose virtual host including an HTML-based configuration module for updating said master configuration files using a point-and-click interface over said IP-compliant network.

24.   (Previously Presented) The load-sharing multi-homed firewall array of claim 23, wherein each of said firewall machines includes N + 1 sets of virtual hosts.

25. (Currently Amended) A load-sharing multi-homed firewall array comprising:

means for coupling a plurality of firewall means in parallel with an IP-compliant network;

each of said firewall means further comprising:

first edge connection means corresponding to a first network connection and second edge connection means corresponding to a second network connection;

said first and second edge connection means further comprising a first set of virtual host means interfacing an associated firewall means with said IP-compliant network and said second set of virtual host means interfacing an associated firewall means with a private network;

each of said virtual hosts of said first and second sets corresponding to a distinct home through which a <u>fully bi-directional</u> connection may be made between said IP-compliant network and said private network;

means for providing DNS functionality associated with each of firewall means;

master configuration means associated with each of the firewall machines; and

means for mapping an ensuing connection request to the first firewall means to respond to a DNS request associated with said ensuing connection request.

26. (Previously Presented) The load-sharing multi-homed firewall array of claim 25, further comprising means for mapping a connection request received from the

IP-compliant network to said first set of virtual host means on the first firewall means to respond to a DNS request.

27.   (Previously Presented) The load-sharing multi-homed firewall array of claim 25, further comprising means for mapping a connection request received from the private network to said second set of virtual host means on the first firewall means to respond to a DNS request.

28.   (Previously Presented) The load-sharing multi-homed firewall array of claim 25, further comprising HTML-based configuration means for updating said master configuration means using a point-and-click interface over said IP-compliant network.

29.   (Previously Presented) The load-sharing multi-homed firewall array of claim 28, wherein each of said firewall means includes $N + 1$ sets of virtual host means.

30.   (Currently Amended) A load-sharing multi-homed firewall array comprising:

an array of firewall machines coupled in a parallel with an IP-compliant network;

each of the firewall machines of the array further comprising:

a first edge connection corresponding to a first network connection and a second edge connection corresponding to a second network connection;

said first and second edge connections further comprising at least a first and second set of virtual hosts, said first set of virtual hosts configured to interface an associated firewall machine with said IP-compliant network and said second set of virtual hosts configured to interface an associated firewall machine with a private network;

each of said virtual hosts of said first and second sets corresponding to a distinct home through which a fully bi-directional connection may be made between said IP-compliant network and said private network;

DNS functionality associated with each of firewall machines of the array;

a master configuration file associated with each of the firewall machines;

a special-purpose virtual host including an HTML-based configuration module for updating said master configuration files using a point-and-click interface over said IP-compliant network; and

wherein an ensuing connection request is mapped to the first firewall machine of the array to respond to a DNS request associated with said ensuing connection request.

31.   (Previously Presented) The load-sharing multi-homed firewall array of claim 30, wherein a connection request received from the IP-compliant network is mapped to said first set of virtual hosts on the first firewall machine of the array to respond to a DNS request.

32.   (Previously Presented) The load-sharing multi-homed firewall array of claim 30, wherein a connection request received from the private network is mapped to

said second set of virtual hosts on the first firewall machine of the array to respond to a DNS request.

33. (Previously Presented) The load-sharing multi-homed firewall array of claim 30, wherein each of said firewall machines further comprises a special-purpose virtual host including an HTML-based configuration module for updating said master configuration files using a point-and-click interface over said IP-compliant network.

34. (Previously Presented) The load-sharing multi-homed firewall array of claim 33, wherein each of said firewall machines includes N + 1 sets of virtual hosts.

35. (Currently Amended) A load-sharing multi-homed firewall array comprising:

means for coupling a plurality of firewall means in parallel with an IP-compliant network;

each of said firewall means further comprising:

first edge connection means corresponding to a first network connection and second edge connection means corresponding to a second network connection;

said first and second edge connection means further comprising a first set of virtual host means interfacing an associated firewall means with said IP-compliant network and said second set of virtual host means interfacing an associated firewall means with a private network;

each of said virtual host means of said first and second sets corresponding to a distinct home through which a fully bi-directional connection may be made between said IP-compliant network and said private network;

means for providing DNS functionality associated with each of firewall means;

master configuration means associated with each of the firewall machines;

HTML-based configuration means for updating said master configuration means using a point-and-click interface over said IP-compliant network; and

means for mapping an ensuing connection request to the first firewall means to respond to a DNS request associated with said ensuing connection request.

36.   (Previously Presented) The load-sharing multi-homed firewall array of claim 35, further comprising means for mapping a connection request received from the IP-compliant network to said first set of virtual host means on the first firewall means to respond to a DNS request.

37.   (Previously Presented) The load-sharing multi-homed firewall array of claim 35, further comprising means for mapping a connection request received from the private network to said second set of virtual host means on the first firewall means to respond to a DNS request.

38.   (Previously Presented) The load-sharing multi-homed firewall array of claim 35, wherein each of said firewall means includes $N + 1$ sets of virtual host means.